DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 299 602 CS 506 387

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TITLE Bakhtin's Dialogics and Rock Lyrics.
PUB DATE Nov 88
NOTE 21p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (74th, New Orleans, LA, November 3-6, 1988).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Audience Awareness; Audiotape Recordings; *Music; Political Attitudes; *Popular Culture; *Rhetorical Invention
IDENTIFIERS Bakhtin (Mikhail); Dialogics; *Lyrics; *Rock Music; Text Factors

ABSTRACT

Rock music is ideological both implicitly (in its intrinsic valuing of change, and resistance to authority, for instance), and explicitly (in political records from activist artists such as John Lennon and U2). The texts of the rock genre offer rhetorical experiences. A dialogic conception may help scholars to account for and describe the processes by which these effects occur and to understand the texts' activity. The listeners' perception of shared meanings, common experiences, and community with the speaker in the text--the singer--adds up to a sense of dialogue, and in this sense the Paul Simons and Bob Dylans of culture can be viewed heuristically as contemporary analogues to the rhapsodes of preliterate Greece. Mikhail Bakhtin's theories are based on the notion that language is a process. For Bakhtin, life is a dialogue in that utterance is based on response. The chronotope shows what it is in the work that the public recognizes, and how the work re-enters the public square. The populist poetry of the contemporary rhapsode becomes a highly important form of discourse across generations, and functions in ways apart from entertainment. Bakhtin characterized the threshold, the dominant chronotope in Jackson Browne's lyrics, as "highly charged with emotion and value" and said that its most fundamental instance is as the "chronotope of crisis and a break in life." Conceptualizing Browne as a contemporary rhapsode shows the text as one in dialogue with society, and the poet-rhetor as a member of his own audience. (Twenty-three references are attached.) (RAE)

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ED299602

BAKHTIN'S DIALOGICS AND ROCK LYRICS

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presented at the 74th meeting of the
SPEECH COMMUNICATION ASSOCIATION
Nov 3-6, 1988

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Professor Allan Bloom, in The Closing of the American Mind, grumbles about his students' love of rock music, "It is their passion;" he writes, "nothing else excites them as it does" (68). Another author writes: "Today's youth-values have been structured and reinforced by their music" (Bloodworth 309). To get some notion of the influence these musicians have with their audiences, one need only note the 1984 presidential campaign in which both Ronald Reagan and and Walter Mondale invoked the name of singer Bruce Springsteen, attempting to appeal to his many fans (Ward et al. 612). The connection between rock and politics was not a new one. Rock music is ideological both implicitly (in its intrinsic valuing of change, and resistance to authority, for instance), and explicitly (in political records from activist artists such as John Lennon and U2). Dave Marsh, one of the medium's foremost critics, states: "My encounters with rock have led directly to political conclusions" (203). It is widely acknowledged that the texts of this genre offer rhetorical experiences. This panel explores critical approaches which may help scholars to account for and describe the processes by which these effects occur. This paper argues that a dialogic conception can help us to understand the texts' activity.

Contemporary Rhapsodes

There are perhaps as many explanations for the popularity of rock music as there are explainers, and this is not the time

to enumerate them. One explanation for the appeal, however, lies in the listeners' perception of shared meanings, common experiences, and community with the speaker in the text: the singer. These ingredients add up to a sense of dialogue, and in this sense we can heuristically view the Paul Simons and Bob Dylans of our culture as contemporary analogues to the rhapsodes of preliterate Greece. In his Preface to Plato, Eric Havelock discusses the communal nature of the rhapsode's performance. The words of the text not only influenced the community but were drawn from the voices of that community: its triumphs and concerns. The rhapsodes, for Havelock, become members of their own audiences, and engage the folk as "partners of a common performance" (124). An example of how the tales sprang up from cultural dialogue is offered by mythologist Joseph Campbell. Campbell posits that the hero tales were, among other things, cathartic conquerings of that which was unknown or dreaded. When Odysseus returned safely from the supernatural terrors of the sea, the people could feel less threatened by those forces. The stories comforted the people, applying the power of myth to the terrifying forces at work in the world: the shifting stars, the changing seasons, the wild animals, and the sea (391). For Campbell, Havelock, and others, the tales' conjuring of cultural dialogue helps account for both its reception into that dialogue and a bolstering of community among audience members. This explanation is similarly offered by rock critics and fans for that medium's reception.

Marsh, for instance, remembers noticing in his teenage

years that "these singers spoke for me as well as to me . . ." and describes the moment as "an intimate revelation . . ." (XX). Another writer, in reference to Bob Dylan, recalls the unique voice of the counterculture that "spoke so directly to and for each individual listener . . ." (Bowden 35). Rich Wiseman, in a popular biography of Jackson Browne, quotes a young fan named George. "I was going through a lot of changes," George explains, "and Jackson Browne was singing about them . . ." (118). Michael McGuire writes of Bruce Springsteen's work as expressing ideas and emotions with which his audience strongly identifies (248). As was the case for rhapsodes, however, the sense of dialogue that marks the work is not strictly between the singer and individual audience member. Rock as social action is largely based on a bonding that occurs among and between audience members. One of the medium's definitive traits is "the ability to draw people together and find a common resonance in their private feelings" (Street 223). Promoter Bill Graham, for example, describes the Grateful Dead's loyal audiences as "a gathering of relatives" with shared values (Gans 58). Rock music is part of what has been called "secondary orality" which reflects preliterate "primary orality", among other ways, in its "fostering of a communal sense . . ." (Ong 136). Perhaps the worldwide broadcast of Live Aid best exemplified that sense, creating, for a day, a global village.

Poetician Elizabeth Drew, explaining the declining appeal of poetry, wrote in 1959: "No one could argue that poetry

has the importance it once had in the community . . . [The poet] will be recognized by the public [only] when the public has recognized itself in the work of the poet" (15). In the oral poetry of rock such mutual recognition does seem to be going on. The audience members' connectedness with the work and with each other, along with the sense that the work speaks to and stems from common and important concerns, likens the singer-songwriter of today to the Homeric and pre-Homeric rhapsodes. These texts reflect and enter a cultural dialogue. Accordingly, in accounting for the rhetorical effects described above, we may employ the dialogic writings of Mikhail Bakhtin, the Russian literary theorist, philosopher, and linguist.

Bakhtin's Dialogics

Mikhail Bakhtin's theories are based on the notion that language is a process. Life is a dialogue in that utterance exists as, invites, is based on, response. Consciousness is plural; we do not experience reality directly, but through an ideological environment comprised of "languages" (regional, economic, familial, professional, religious, political, etc.) of a culture, with which we speak and to which we respond (Bakhtin 293). Bakhtin calls this state of affairs, or many-languagedness, "heteroglossia." Within the ideological environment, meanings and words are value-laden. Of the competing voices, some are privileged and others are deprivileged. The privileged, authoritative word is exemplified by "religious dogma" or "acknowledged scientific truth," and to question it is to blaspheme (Bakhtin 342-43). The privileged word is externally

persuasive; it binds us to it with its own authority (Bakhtin 342). For example, when a conservative politician says, regarding national health insurance, "that's communism," he or she has, in certain quarters, ended the discussion and suppressed other interpretations. Deprivileged voices are internally persuasive. We can assimilate, as we choose, and partially accept or reject this discourse, which is a "contemporary word born in a zone of contact" with other meanings and words (Bakhtin 346). For Bakhtin, the deprivileged word is more "polyphonic," that is, it evokes other voices rather than suppressing them. For example, I use a southern colloquialism, and my utterance echoes other voices, while still being mine.

For Bakhtin, literary texts come from, and reflect, or rather, echo, the heteroglossia of a culture. He is primarily interested in studying the novel as deprivileged text, in hopes of releasing the voices it may contain. Given the deprivileged nature of the rock text, its immediacy as utterance, and its tendency to destabilize established "monologic norms" we can reasonably extend Bakhtin's writings to these texts.

Bakhtin has introduced a critical tool known as the chronotope, which helps account for a given text's dialogic relationship to its society. The term, borrowed from Einstein's theory of relativity, refers to the inseparability of time and space (time as the fourth dimension of space). Cultural systems perceive reality in terms of time and space, and literary texts will be reflective of these perceptual categories. Bakhtin writes:

> In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought out whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot, and history. This intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope (84).

The chronotope, as spatialized time frame, determines the kinds of interactions and utterances that will happen within a text. For Bakhtin, "the chronotope as a formally constitutive category determines to a significant degree the image of man [sic] in literature as well" (85). Hayden White, explicating Bakhtin's idea, notes that the chronotopes "authorize a wedding of a specific content with a specific literary form," and that such control over events distinguishes the concept from any "religious, mythical, or psychological archetypes" (307). The chronotope, then, has generic significance, that is, we can classify discourse according to the time-space in which consciousnesses interact. So understood, the chronotope becomes "an optic for reading texts as x-rays of the forces at work in the culture system from which they spring" (Bakhtin 426).

Examples of chronotopes offered by Bakhtin are instructive of the concept's critical utility. One such example is the castle of the Gothic novel. The traces of the centuries are there, writes Bakhtin, " in visible form as various parts of its architecture, in furnishings, weapons," and other tangible presences (246). More importantly, "legends and traditions animate every corner of the castle. . . It is this quality that gives rise to the specific kind of narrative inherent in castles and that is then

worked out in Gothic novels" (246). Time is oriented toward the past, and the voices of the aristocratic lords, of the landed families, are privileged. Another such example is the parlor of Balzac. Here we see "the secrets of the boudoir; the interweaving of petty, private concerns with political and financial intrigues" (247). What Bakhtin called everyday time is here condensed into a series of competitive interactions taking place under the mask of civility. This chronotope marks the rise of "the new social hierarchy" and "life's new king- money" (247). The parlor, as the chronotope of this shift, makes the epoch graphically and narratively visible.

Ending his discussion of the chronotope, Bakhtin says:"Within the limits of a single work and within the literary output of a single author we may notice a number of different chronotopes and complex interactions among them . . ." (252). Several different chronotopes can exist in a state of complementarity or tensiveness, one may envelope the others, indeed, any number of interactions is possible.

The chronotope, then, is a critical lens through which one observes the way spatial and temporal indicators are fused in a text. As an overarching structure, the chronotope controls the interaction of voices represented in a text, and serves as an optic for how reality-structures in the world have permeated the work. To step back for a moment, we said earlier that rock songs were alike to the rhapsodic texts of preliterate Greece in

their relations with their audiences, comprised of intense identification and community-building, or "common resonance in their private feelings" (Street 223). Bakhtin's chronotopic analysis can give us an insight as to what contemporary forces in the text cause such identification and community-building. Analyzing Jackson Browne's work demonstrates the utility of a Bakhtinian approach to the work o: our contemporary rhapsodes.

Chronotope in Browne's Work

I find three major chronotopes in Browne's work: the road, the provincial town, and the threshold. Along with Bakhtin's descriptions of each, I offer examples from Browne's work, then look at the relationships among the three.

The road is associated by Bakhtin with encounters of people with a wide variety of backgrounds. This democratizing chronotope breeds interaction across lines of age, class, creed, etc. In bringing these different people together under similar circumstances, the use of contrast on the road can show a collapse of social distance. The road is often used as the scene for beginnings and endings in episodic plots. The start of the new tale and the denouement of the last co-exist as time "fuses together and space flows in it . . ." (Bakhtin 243-244). Browne's work exemplifies the road chronotope again and again. "Looking into You" is an instance of people brought together by the road. The protaganist of the piece, a traveller, stops to look into a house he'd once lived in. He finds the people there now to be completely different from him, stable citizens, with no wanderlust, and after talking with them a while, the speaker hears "that highway whisper and sigh,

'Are you ready to fly?' ." He returns to the road, watching "the faces all passing by," and reflects on the changing nature of his own life and the world in general. Finally, the speaker, now addressing a lover he has met on the way, realizes that he does not mind the lack of stability in his life, and says that the people he meets on the road are all the stability he needs to find. The denouement leads to a new departure as the album's next song finds the hero back on a road full of people "Who have no idea where they will go/ But they'll help you if they can" ("Rock Me on the Water," Jackson Browne). At times, Browne's characters see the road as an escape from responsibility, as in "The Road and the Sky," in which Browne sings "They told me I was gonna have to work for a living/ But all I want to do is ride" (Late For the Sky). The road always leads somewhere, however, whether it is to nourishing respites with friends, or into the face of tragedy. The hero remains certain only that he must keep moving.

The provincial town, in Browne's early work especially, is a frequent stopping place for the weary traveller. Bakhtin described this chronotope as the "locus for everyday time" (247). "Here," he wrote, "there are no events, only 'doings' that constantly repeat themselves. Time here . . . moves in narrow circles . . ." (247-248). The circles are concentric, days surrounded by weeks, months, years, all shaped the same. Time is uneventful. Browne's "Jamaica, Say You Will" occurs in such a chronotope. In the concentric circles of existense, the love affair becomes not an affair so much as a "way to fill these empty hours," and the afternoons are all the same, the young lovers lying in the tall

grass amidst the shadows, until the evening bell ends their time together (Jackson Browne). The slightly out-of-focus description of the erotic images gives the song the hazy, dreamlike quality of a Renoir nude, and the spare arrangement on the album complements the simplicity of this chronotope. The provincial town, for all its peacefulness, is frequently used as a "sharply contrasting background for temporal sequences that are more charged with energy and event" (Bakhtin 248).

Bakhtin characterized the threshold, Jackson Browne's dominant chronotope, as "highly charged with emotion and value" and said that its most fundamental instance is as the "chronotope of crisis and a break in a life" (Bakhtin 248). In the threshold time is "instantaneous; it is as if it had no duration and falls out of the normal course of biographical time" (Bakhtin 248). The threshold utterances will be polyphonic, incorporating the spirit of the public square, charged with interchange of ideas. For Browne, the image of changing light, or light frozen at "between" moments often serves as a textual indicator of the threshold. His work is marked by uncertainty, so these questions, representative of the "public square" are considered apart from the "high noon" settings of much American narrative. "Late for the Sky," a song about relationships in the age of sexual politics, finds Browne leaving a relationship after seeing its emptiness in "the whispered promises in the changing light" (Late For the Sky). "The Pretender," another of Browne's speakers, faces his dilemma between "the longing for love/ and the struggle for the legal tender" as "the morning light comes streaming in " (The Pretender).

The interactions among the three chronotopes form a cycle in Browne's work: a journey on the road, with stops in the provincial town, leading toward the threshold. The threshold-- the chronotope of instantaneous time, voices of the public square, and dynamic breaks in consciousness-- is the most important for Browne, whose work deals so much with growth. In this sense, Browne becomes a kind of existential hero, on a journey such as Campbell described. The differences become obvious, however. Browne's quest is one of understanding, not action, and unlike the heroes Campbell discussed, the hero is not better or stronger than the rest of us. The road, and other symbols along it, are not used as universal archetypes but as specifically situat chronotopes, overarching lyrical structures which reflect, or rather echo, cultural voices of uncertainty and confusion. It was this resonance that critic Jack McDonough referred when he noted how perfect Browne's themes of insecurity were for a nation "watching the frightening ugliness of Bob Haldeman and John Erlichman on TV" (245).

The Everyman Cycle

One of the clearest instances of the chronotopic cycle in Browne's work is in his album For Everyman, released in 1973. The cyclic pattern is one in which the persona seeks a way to understand and react to the repression and disillusionment in his homeland, and the subsequent exodus of many of his friends. The nation is experiencing disillusionment with government, an unpopular war is being fought abroad, and the fervent idealism of the 1960s is winding down. Browne, as a member of the generation undergoing these changes, speaks for a group Arthur Miller identified in a

1973 essay depicting the new decade as one of

> casualties all around us, people with drug-injured heads, too-young girls with unwanted kids, and perhaps worst of all, the sane and sound who ten years ago entrained for Nirvana and find themselves yet again, in the United States (xviii).

In this era the talk ran, in the "public square" of the counter-culture, to separation from mainstream society, and a Utopian escape. David Crosby and Steven Stills develop that fantasy in their 1969 song "Wooden Ships". Crosby's voice urges his fellow dissenters to "go take a sister by the hand/ Lead her away from this foreign land/ Far way where we might laugh again," and, speaking for the peace-loving folk, advises the tyrants,"We are leaving, you don't need us, you don't need us." The speaker sees escape as the answer to the tensions in the homeland. Much of Browne's early work reflects this same notion of escapism, in his chronotope of the road. In "From Silver Lake," on 1972's Jackson Browne, the speaker tells of a friend leaving: "He won't be back/ And the sun may find him sleeping in the dust/ Of some ruin far away." As the lyric progresses Browne realizes that, like his friend, "he can't breathe here," and ends the song with a slight twist on an earlier line: "We won't be back."

For Everyman picks up with the persona still on the road in "Take it Easy," fleeing the "world of trouble" on his mind, and trying to "loosen" the "load" he has been carrying. The song is an upbeat piece that captures the feeling of relief and escape from responsibility that sometimes marks this chronotope in Browne's work. The speaker urges himself to "Lighten up while you still can/

Don't even try to understand . . . Take it Easy." The hero turns up, after an acoustic musical segue, in the provincial town in "Our Lady of the Well," a song Browne wrote for some friends who fled the draft by heading to Mexico (Wiseman 88). Here the routine is simple and relaxed:

> It is a dance we do in silence
> Far below this morning sun
> You in your life, me in mine
> We have begun.
>
> Here we stand and without speaking
> Draw the water from the well
> And stare across the plains to where the
> Mountains lie so still.

Even with the peace of the village, newfound romance, and the healing water from the well, the speaker realizes he must return to his home. The locus of everyday time and stillness of space which mark the provincial town chronotope, are used frequently as backdrop for more energy-infused events. This is certainly the case here:

> Across my home has grown the shadow
> Of a cruel and senseless hand
> Though in some strong hearts
> The love and truth remain
> And it has taken me this distance
> And a woman's smile to learn
> That my heart remains among them
> And to them I must return.

The speaker realizes that the threshold is there to cross; threshold experience permeates almost all of the work. In part of the song, Browne had looked at the simplicity of the villagers' culture and longingly observed, "Oh, its so far the other way/ My country's gone." As the song evolves and the speaker realizes he cannot escape his own country's problems he again looks at the village and sings, "Oh its so far the other way/ My life has gone." The personal and

the political are inextricably intertwined.

"Colors of the Sun," the album's next song, finds Browne on the road again. He bids farewell to the friends who will remain in the village, and sets out for home. The piece begins in haiku, in a simple description of the beauty of the place he must leave:

> Colors of the Sun
> Flashing on the watertop
> Echo on the land.

This description is starkly contrasted with the picture he finds on the way home: a landscape cluttered with images of hopelessness and despair. The people "Scuffle with the crowd to get their share," and seek escape from their miserable lives. Perhaps referring to the use of illicit drugs, Browne describes the people who must "Dream to conquer little bits of time." In a poignant commentary on the quick-spiritual-fix mentality of the times, and its subsequent disappointments, Browne observes:

> Disillusioned saviors search the sky
> Wanting just to show someone the way
> Asking all the people passing by-
> "Doesn't anybody want the way?"

The journey through his home continues, with romances along with further observations on the bad times across the land. Browne takes note of the drug of television ("Now your daddy's in the den/ Shooting up the evening news"), and uncertainty in relationships ("It wouldn't occur to us to wonder/ Is this the past or the future that is calling?"). Finally in the title song, "For Everyman," the speaker reaches the threshold.

Space becomes a point of departure, and time is seen at the "between" state of dusk, as the voices of the "public square" are

evoked:

> Everybody I talk to is ready to leave
> With the light of the morning
> They've seen the end coming down
> Long enough to believe
> That they've heard their least warning
> Standing alone, each has his own
> Ticket in his hand
> And as the evening descends I sit thinking
> 'Bout Everyman.

The people with tickets in their hands, waiting for morning light while the evening descends fuse temporal and spatial indicators to create a threshold for the speaker, as does the conjuring of the public square and its voices of Utopian escape. Browne, addressing his peers-- an audience of which he is also a member-- concedes the appeal of the escapist position, acknowledging his own dreams of finding a place "Where with a few of my friends I could give up the race/ Maybe find something better." Yet, crossing the threshold into what Bakhtin characterized as a break in understanding, Browne makes the simple point that the only Utopia to be found is in collective effort, not individual escape. "Make it on your own if you think you can," Browne sings, but at some point, "You're gonna need a hand." He further warns us about escapism of the spiritual variety:

> Everybody's just waiting to hear from the One
> Who can give them the answer
> And lead them back to that place
> In the warmth of the Sun
> Where sweet childhood still dances.

Browne suggests that the vision is not to be realized through the divine guidance of "strong but gentle Father's hand," unless it is the collective hand of us all.

As he waits for humanity to quit hoping for pie-in-the-sky

solutions to life's difficulties, Browne realizes that the "Everyman" could become yet another pipe dream. "I'm waiting here for Everyman/ Don't ask me if he'll show/ I don't know," Browne sings. This sense of waiting for one who might hold the future in his hands evokes another voice in the cultural dialogue of uncertainty and confusion: Samuel Beckett's "Waiting for Godot," which had become a standardly referred to text in discussions of late-twentieth century angst (Barrett 63). As a dialogical speaker, Browne offers no closure on the dialogue. He stands at the threshold of understanding, having reached a better grasp of the voices in his world, yet claims:

> I'm not trying to tell you that I've seen the plan
> Turn and walk away if you think I am
> But don't think too badly of one who's left holding sand-
> He's just another dreamer, dreaming about
> Everyman.

There have been other cycles in Jackson Browne's work, other aspects of our world within his songs, but perhaps the Everyman cycle best exemplifies Browne as existential hero. While he sings of the Everyman on one hand, on the other hand he <u>is</u> the Everyman: an ordinary person trying to make sense of things.

Chronotopic analysis of the text enables us to uncover some of the voices within the work, voices from the cultural dialogue of the early 1970s, the end of the idealistic preceding era. Conceptualizing Browne as a contemporary rhapsode helps us to see the text as one in dialogue with a society, and the poet-rhetor as a member of his own audience. The strong appeal of the text, in this

conceptualization, lies in the public's recognition of itself in the work. The chronotope shows us what it is in the work that the public recognizes, and how the work re-enters the public square. As we move further into an age of secondary orality, this populist poetry of the contemporary rhapsode becomes a highly important form of discourse across generations, and functions in ways apart from entertainment. Robert Hilburn, a rock music critic for the Los Angeles Times, notes:

> For many people in the rock generation, these musicians-- the Dylans, Lennons, Springsteens-- become, for at least a time in our lives, the vehicle for defining and articulating our frustrations and desires. By learning more about them,we may also be trying to learn more about ourselves and why we respond to them (12).

Hilburn's position is correct. It has always been the position of the rhapsode to teach us more about ourselves. As we reach a better understanding of what these texts may have to show us, we also learn more about our own cultural dialogue. Bakhtin's dialogical approach can help lead us to such knowledge.

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